



Duffy, Kate (2023) Cultivating a Moral Imagination for Future Teacher Educators: The Dilemma of Teacher Assessment. In: Philosophy of Education of Australasia, 6th - 9th December 2023, Auckland, New Zealand. (Unpublished)

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Cultivating a Moral Imagination for Future Educators

The dilemma of Teacher-Assessed Grades during Covid

Kate Duffy

PESA, 7th December 2023

The Context of Teacher Education in England



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- Carter Review of Initial teacher Training (ITE) in 2014
- Introduction of the Core Content Framework (CCF) & Early Career Framework (ECF) in 2019
- ITT Market review & reaccreditation reduced providers from 68 to 179

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A Profession in Crisis



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- Significant under recruitment for a number of years and high attrition (40,000)
- Higher salaries and conditions in the private sector
- Increase of high-stakes accountability measures resulting in higher workload and limiting autonomy (Fullard, 2023)

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Premise for the study

- Teaching is becoming **increasingly standardised** within systems of high-stakes accountability. At the same time, the moral work of teachers is becoming increasingly more complex.
- If ITE creates space for pre-service educators to critically understand and **negotiate the complex moral dilemmas that they will face**, could this help to reduce demoralisation?

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The Context of the Study



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- **66 students** on a 3 year Education Studies degree. Students then progress to a 4th year to complete their practical teacher training.
- In 3rd Year, we introduced the module, Ethics in Education. The aim of the module is **to illuminate the complexity of decision making** and ethical reasoning from a range of perspectives and actors.
- Part of their assessment for the module is a **critical analysis** of a range of dilemmas in education

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Moral Imagination



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- Moral imagination provides an **enriched way of thinking about our moral lives** because it suggests that we do not just follow rules or take action in perfect harmony with our values; rather, our moral behaviour stems from a dynamic interplay of perception, reasoning, and feeling (Joseph, 2003; 2016)
- The ability **to imagine is to work through** these complex laws, codes of ethics and stakeholder positions including their own (Chapman et al, 2013)

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Moral Imagination



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- Promoting the nurturing of student teachers' moral imagination to **prepare them for the relational and moral complexities** of the future work (Joseph, 2016; Osguthorpe & Sanger 2013; Estola et al 2022)
- A teacher with well-developed moral reasoning and imagination cultivates a learning environment that nurtures student development and well-being and that fosters critical thinking, discussion, and **a sense of agency** in order to support and promote democratic practices (Cook-Sather, Baker-Doyle, 2017)

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The Data



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- 66 Written assessments of 1000 words
 - Explain the nature of the dilemma
 - State their decision,
 - Explain their reasons for the dilemma and the consequences that this will have
- Aim is to **slow the process** of ethical deliberation

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Process of analysis



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- Content analysis using deductive coding applying Shapira-Lischinsky's (2010) model to establish the nature of the dilemma
- Content analysis using inductive coding for their reasoning and stated consequences (Saldana, 2016)
- Categorising the reasons into Estola's (2022) actors - teacher, student, 'other'

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Summary data



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- 66 scripts in response to,
Should we adopt teacher-assessed grades for high stakes assessment?
- 3rd of the students didn't clearly state YES or NO (25 Yes, 15 No)

Regardless of their decision, it was based upon a utilitarian view of the greater good and an ethic of justice

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Reasons that TAGs was fair for students



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- Students were the primary beneficiaries of this utilitarian decision
- Loss of learning:
 - unable to access the full curriculum,
 - significant inequality of experience from home-schooling;
- Students **should be allowed** to progress to the next stage of their study

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However.. Concerns



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- Concerned about the increasing workload and pressure for teachers
- Concerned that teachers will show bias and therefore their grades may not be reliable
- Some wrote of not trusting teachers to make unbiased judgments
- They wrote about the need to **dilute the student teacher relationship** (ethic of care) for the sake of reliable accountability (when its needed most?)

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Consequences



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- Willing to accept grade inflation and grade discrepancies
- Accountability will be difficult
- Willing to accept the vulnerability of the moral agent for the good of the 'other' (Garrison, 1997)
- **Relegate the 'felt dimensions' of the student teacher relationship to the margins challenging the role of care (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2022)**

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Conclusions



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- This topical dilemma enabled them to see the complexity of decision making
- Revealed the tension between teacher autonomy and the institutional & professional norms (Colnerud 1997)
- Identified the nature of the dilemma - Tension between rewards for effort and standards (Shapira-Lischinsky, 2010)

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Implications for ITT



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- The use of dilemmas can reveal pre-service educator's moral thinking to both themselves and teacher educators
- Using pedagogical practices which foster a moral imagination highlight **context** rather than fixed ethical rules (Joseph, 2003; Chapman, Forster, Buchanan, 2013; Cook-Sather, Baker-Doyle 2017)
- Overly prescriptive CCF does not leave space for slow deliberation of ethical dilemmas
- There are different dialogues to be had around the decisions taken
- The university assessment and grading criteria does not lend itself to 'judging' dilemmas

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